

## **Prologue:**

Harry stood on the precipice of a great decision- a terrible but great decision. He was fourteen years old with partial memories a life he would live if he changed nothing. That life only extended to just before his eighteenth birthday when he was killed by his brother.

Daniel was his great decision.

He watched with hooded eyes a scene from his memory playing out live before him. This time he wasn't helpless. He knew the consequences of either choice. His first large change, he thought grimly, and it had to be this.

Below him in the graveyard, the shape in the cauldron became solid, the shadows of the night forming to wrap him in robes. Voldemort was strong once more. Harry observed dispassionately Voldemort's examination of his new body. He had seen this before.

Though the original experience felt like a fish bowl, things seemed distorted or out of focus. There was also a strong sense of déjà vu but that was to be expected. The only thing absent was his determination to see that Daniel live. It would be so much simpler if he died now.

§Sire,§ Serion hissed quietly, raising his head to watch in horrid fascination Voldemort's return.

In the quiet night Voldemort's voice drifted to them on the wind. "My wand, Wormtail."

§Yes, Serion?§ Harry asked quietly, gliding softly along the line of trees, staying in shadows.

§What do you plan to do?§

§I don't know,§ Harry murmured, his keen eyes watching, waiting.

Serion spoke forcefully, §If he lives...§

§If he dies Voldemort will think he's unstoppable. I would be put in the spotlight, because the curse being broken won't protect me from Dumbledore's schemes, and I won't figure out how he beat me when Voldemort could not.§

§But he won't have the chance to kill you either.§

Harry shrugged. §I have time,§ he answered, watching Voldemort torture Daniel under the Cruciatus Curse.

§You have about ten minutes to decide,§ Serion reminded. §Just think, if they found both his body and Cedric's. There's no way that Fudge could deny Voldemort's return when the Boy-Who-Lived is now the Boy-Who-Died.§

§Does inaction count as a murder, Serion?§ Harry asked his friend, slipping backward into the woods as the bright light from Daniel's prior incantation spell mingled with Voldemort's killing curse, mimicking a brother wand effect.

Serion bit back his automatic response and thought it through. Finally, slowly, he replied, §My liege, you could not be held accountable for your brother's death. If you could be, then so could Dumbledore. You already expect that he knows what is happening here in the graveyard.§

§We are both accountable for Cedric's murder then.§

§You did not remember that he would die.§

Harry grimaced angrily. §I should have when I first saw him land from the portkey.§

§But you did not orchestrate either the portkey or Cedric touching the cup and being transported here.§

§Does it matter what I did or did not do?§ Harry asked, shaking his head in frustration.

Serion snorted in disbelief. §Everything you do or do not do matters in this little game of fate versus free will.§

Harry grimaced again as the specters started pouring out of Voldemort's wand. First Cedric, then an old man, followed by a woman... Harry closed his eyes to them and turned to watch the Death Eaters prowl around the golden cage.

It really was a clever spell for his brother to use. For such an unimaginative dueler to have pulled that out of his cap was simply remarkable. The sudden intelligence under pressure of life and death situations indicated a more Slytherin side to his brother than Harry would have guessed.

The cage came down as Daniel dropped his end to the power holding the spell up and he ran. Death Eaters shouted and curses flew. Harry cast a shield as one spun wildly off course in his direction and trained his wand on the Triwizard Cup.

Who was Harry Potter? That question was going to be answered in a few moments... was he stalwart of character, saving even his own murderer from certain death? Or was he the King of Snakes, who weighed the death of one soul against the potential gain? Could he live with himself afterwards? Could he make the choice to kill his brother – to let him die?

Dozens of red and green Unforgivables splashed against the ground, spraying pockets of dirt in the air. Harry stood trembling in the shadows, parallel with his brother who finally reached his position. Serion hissed something unintelligible and Harry made his decision. He dropped his arm and waited with bated breath.

He would not save Daniel, who was feckless, cruel, and self-serving. Some people deserved to die. Daniel's guardian angel was putting up his halo. If by some miracle he survived...

Daniel tripped over a hole in the ground and fell forward in an ungraceful sprawl. The Death Eaters hurried to surround him, none so foolish as to be the one to do him in when their master was in their midst.

Harry forced himself to watch as Voldemort's lipless mouth peeled back into a sinister smile. Triumph glittered in his blood red eyes as he halted before Daniel's form. The scene grew suddenly still and

silent. Harry held his breath and even Serion was poised, motionless on his arm.

"Please..." Daniel squeaked, scrambling backwards.

"Good-bye Daniel Potter," Voldemort murmured victoriously, raising his wand with little hesitation. "Avada Kedavra."

Green light flew from Voldemort wand striking Daniel square in the forehead. Fear gripped his features as he slumped backwards. Daniel was dead.

And Harry knew exactly who he was as Voldemort tipped his head back and crowed to the hunter's moon high overhead. Harry Potter was dangerous. Perhaps he was even more dangerous than any dark lord could hope to be, because Harry Potter was capable of making great decisions.

**-End Prologue-**

AN: Credit for title of this sequel goes to CatWriter. Please expect infrequent updates. The story is not exactly a top priority for myself as of late. Thanks and enjoy!

## Chapter 1

Harry gazed at Borgin idly, a tiny smirk hinted at his mouth. When Harry had first become king he had to merge the behavior of the beast with his own innate character. A little of each had suffered as the consequence. A year down in the Chamber working on his animagus form and personality convergence had taught him one thing... what it meant to be king. Then his humanity took a blow when he realized he was capable of killing his brother.

Slipping back to Hogwarts had been pathetically simple compared to the journey from his memory. Voldemort and his merry men were just starting their victory revel. The dark mark had been cast into the sky as Harry had spun on his heel and apparated to Hogsmeade. Without Daniel's abrupt return from the graveyard and the blubbering incoherency from before, the atmosphere was still tense when Harry entered the stadium under a disillusionment charm.

He didn't have to wait long for Voldemort to send Daniel and Cedric back. Daniel had come back minus a head and Cedric had returned without a face to call his own. Gory and bloodthirsty, it screamed of insanity and certainty of victory... of power. Harry had watched with keen observing eyes the fallout that had happened next.

Fudge was an incoherent mess, blustering like a pro until wilting under the undeniable truth. Lord Voldemort was back and the Boy-Who-Lived was dead. He'd been kicked out of office before the weekend was out. Minister Bones had taken the miserable cretin's public post before he had had time to pack up his desk.

Come Monday, the Department of Magical Law Enforcement had seen a huge boost in funds. Before the week was out talk of a draft was circling in the Wizengamot and scaring all the little purebloods and neutrals. They were perfectly willing to sacrifice muggleborns for the sake of their rights but not their own lives.

As summer had started, Harry had taken on a new mission. Serion begged him to hold off, let the knowledge of the future weigh in his decisions, but Harry knew something Serion did not. Daniel's death upped the timeframe. He had to locate and destroy all he could now so when Voldemort made his move, Harry would be ready.

Do or die. Now or never. Those were the only options and Harry was not one to sit by idly. Borgin knew all too well what Harry did when he got bored. The man was shivering; slumped against the rickety old chair Harry had tied him to before torturing. The man needed better security if he was going to run shop in Knockturn Alley.

"I know you possess something of Voldemort's here," Harry said slowly, coldly. "Something Lucius Malfoy gave you..."

Borgin spat out blood and glared at Harry. "I told you I have no idea--"

Harry flicked his wand and Borgin cried out, withering wildly in the chair as his nerve endings burned from imaginary fire. The effect was similar to the Crucio, but managed to squeak by on being overly dark and unnecessary instead of Unforgivable. The first time he had cast it on Borgin he had smiled evilly and said, "Compliments of Hogwarts's Forbidden Section."

It had sounded appropriately dispassionate and anti-hero at the time, but Harry was tiring of this madness. How much longer could Borgin hold up before giving in and spilling all the secrets that Harry sought? He lifted the curse and saw that Borgin had wet himself again. Steeling his jaw Harry sneered at the man before him who was softly crying.

"Lucius unloads dark goodies so often it is a wonder the man has any left. Now tell me, where is this item?" Harry raised his wand again and Borgin broke.

"Nn-no," Borgin pleaded. "I-I'll tell you."

Harry lowered his wand and raised his eyebrow, impatient to be done with this whole scene. He needed to go throw up, and only fierce determination kept him from doing it right now. It was time for Borgin to talk.

"It's over there in the display case," he choked, spitting out more blood from where he bit through his lip.

Harry crossed the dusty floorboards to the other side of the shop. He looked in the display case at the myriad of objects inside and stepped

back. One look around revealed a large creepy hand nearby and Harry grabbed it and smashed it through the glass. When the hand gripped back, Harry sliced himself on the shards of glass struggling to get free.

Anger coursed through him; the anger helped. It cleansed the nausea out of his system and fired him up. The hand released its fierce grip and flew across the room. Harry vanished the glass and raked his hand along the top of all the objects. The small golden cup sparked to life and Harry smirked picking it up.

Holding it up, Harry examined it closely before turning back to the panting proprietor. "Good show," Harry complimented, his bright green eyes glowing in the darkness.

Borgin stared in fascination at the eerie glow. It was the last thing he saw before he died, he did not have time to fear for his life. Harry blinked and his human eyes stared at the dead man before him. Casually and with great care, Harry turned Borgin's body into a rusty spittoon and stuck him on an overflowing shelf. Nobody would ever find him, Harry made sure of that.

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Serion watched Harry puking his guts out in the tiny water closet at the Leaky Cauldron. He didn't say anything, but his eyes were filled with concern and sympathy. Harry wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He trembled all over. He looked a mess with his skin pasty white and his hair slick with sweat.

The Hufflepuff cup rested on the counter by the sink in the bathroom, glinting dully under the light. Harry couldn't look at it without getting the urge to vomit again. He waved his hand at it and flew out the door and landed on the bed in the other room. Harry shook his head and braced himself against the sink.

§Go on, say it,§ Harry rasped.

§Say what, sire?§ Serion asked quietly. §Do you want me to tell you your methods were wrong or that what you did was necessary?§

Harry hissed, §Serion.§

Serion tilted his head innocently. §You know what you did was wrong or your body wouldn't be reacting so violently.§

Harry suddenly heaved the meager contents of his stomach into the sink. §I am grateful my body still retains its moral compass,§ he said weakly, using the hand towel to clean his mouth. §I rather wish it would lose it. I don't know how much more of this I can take.§

Serion's eyes soften with pity. §Master, you need rest. Get some sleep, your mind and body will sort it all out in your dreams.§

Harry nodded, brushing and rinsing quickly before stumbling into the other room and falling in a heap unto the bed. Serion slithered up the bedpost before spilling onto the mattress in one sleek dive and crawling to his space on Harry's pillow. Seeking to comfort his depressed friend, Serion brushed his body against Harry's cheek before curling up for the night.

Harry heaved a sigh, sounding as if the whole world was weighing him down. In several agitated movements, Harry resituated himself on the bed and closed his eyes. Hedwig swooped through the open window and landed lightly on her bedpost. A minute later Harry was lunging off the bed and racing toward the bathroom. Hedwig hooted with alarm looking down at Serion for answers to her pet's behavior.

§I don't think I've ever known a single snake getting this worked up over a kill,§ Serion offered helpfully, curling tighter. §You are a predator, it is kind of your job to kill.§

A groan drifted out to him and Serion chuckled, the mirth of the situation tickling him. A snake never cared about the mouse, but apparently his king did. Hedwig and Serion would have to be careful not to eat the mice in front of Harry for a little while or puke up the remains of bones. Harry's weak constitution was too delicate to risk.

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The newspaper the next day reported several disappearances. One witch had been the director of the Floo Network, causing concern with



the Ministry. They were taking precautions and shutting down the fireplaces and wards that ran the operation. If she had been compromised, more disappearances were likely to happen as the fallout if they didn't remain vigilant.

The Prophet also blathered on willy-nilly about Daniel Potter's death. His parents were photographed at every angle with red rimmed, tearful eyes and grim bleak faces. It was surprising that the Prophet had a chance to write the one piece of actual hard news or the space. The Boy-Who-Died, as he was now called, the moniker was far more fitting than its original version, was the biggest news since the defeat of the Dark Lord by a one year old baby.

Daniel was famous even in death. Harry did not understand the magical world. Instead of reporting on Bones' efforts they were determined to spend their time writing theories about Daniel being the Chosen One and that his death meant Voldemort had already won. That type of reporting would not bolster the masses; it would only serve to make them panic and hopeless.

Harry tossed the paper aside and finished his scrambled eggs. His constitution was much improved by the sleep Serion had suggested late last night. There were things to do today that could not wait. Harry had to open his Gringotts account, and deposit a large sum of money into it. But first, he thought with a sneaky grin, he would have to sell the goblins the giant fist size sapphire he'd recovered from his Uncle Sirius' residence. The hound dog would never miss it.

He rapped the top of the bar to get Tom's attention. Tom came over, wiping down a clean glass as he went.

"What can I do you for, Mr. Potter?"

Harry grimaced at the name as it drew heads around. "I have a few errands in the Alley. I'll be back again tonight. If anyone comes looking for me I'm not here."

"But what about yer parents?" Tom asked, disgruntled. "You told me--"

Harry waved him off and clambered to his feet. "My brother was murdered, Tom, I need time to myself, think things through. He was my twin after all. I need to be alone without everyone asking after me."

"But Mr. Pot--"

"Not here," Harry repeated firmly. Tom nodded dumbly, watching him leave.

Behind the Leaky Cauldron Harry met up with Serion and Hedwig. Leaning down, Harry offered Serion a tail up before tapping the bricks and entering into the Alley. Hedwig soared overhead, carefully avoiding collisions with other owls also trailing their owners, which granted were fewer than what one might have expected for summer. Voldemort's return of Daniel's lifeless body had obviously sent a message that the wizarding populace was listening to wholeheartedly.

Harry walked up the crooked steps to the crooked white bank and entered with barely a greeting to the doorman. He crossed the distance to the teller stations and without a by-your-leave entered into the back of the banking premises to the offices. He was looking for the goblin in charge of increasing the banks assets, the buyer if you will. He found the beast easily enough and strode through the door with a confidence that bordered on arrogance.

"Excuse me, I am busy," sneered an ugly goblin sitting behind a formidable desk.

Harry raised an eyebrow at the scattered Playwizards and adult magazines before swiftly sitting. "You are now," he answered.

"Get out, boy," the goblin snarled, baring pointy yellow teeth.

"As soon as we have concluded business," Harry said agreeably. "I have a rather large artifact that I am sure the goblins would love to get their hands on."

"We have enough artifacts."

Harry nodded. "Still trying to get rid of me, are you?" He pulled out the tiny bag he had stuck the gem inside.

"If that is your idea of large, I would hate to see what you thought was tiny."

Harry shot the goblin a scornful look. "I shrunk it so I would not get mugged on the way here. *Engorgio*."

The sapphire grew and grew until it no longer resembled the size of a gobstone. It looked like the fist of a giant, huge, large enough to cover a dinner plate. Harry smirked to himself and cut the spell off, leaving the gem larger than it had been before he shrunk it.

The goblin looked ready to leap on the jewel and start simpering over it. "What do you think Gringotts can do for you?" he said, attempting at casual.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I want to sell it to Gringotts, convert it into gold. I simply can't be seen chipping off pieces of it in stores."

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The haggling took up much of the afternoon, Ragnok had to be called in to sign the bank's approval, etc. etc. but finally Harry walked away with a premium vault filled with a large fortune in galleons. The source of his money solved, Harry snuck through the alley back to his room at the Leaky Cauldron.

A swift glance through the window revealed his mother and father pleading with Tom. Harry couldn't make out the words but he knew well enough that the worried facades of his parents who had already lost one son to Voldemort would swiftly gain from Tom the information they were seeking on Harry's whereabouts. Harry whistled and Hedwig made her appearance from the rooftop.

"We're leaving girl, gather Serion and get to Hogsmeade. I'll meet you before dinner."

Hedwig hooted in annoyance at having the task of carrier pigeon.

“No buts, Hedwig. I can’t look out for Serion.”

She hooted once more and cuffed the side of his head as she took off. Harry watched her disappear inside his room and exited a moment later with a hissing and spitting Serion. Harry chuckled darkly and returned his attention to the scene happening inside. The twin anxious figures of his suddenly concerned parents amused him greatly and another chuckle escaped.

“What do the bloody fools think I’ll do? Praise Merlin and become their lapdog?” Harry rasped softly before casting a disillusionment and a notice-me-not charm on his person and standing up. “Besides, Sirius fills that position and why should I deprive him of it?”

He spied a merchant coming toward the end of Alley and got into position by the door. A quick glance through the side windows revealed Tom quite on the verge of capitulating. Luckily, the local merchant reached the door just then and stealing inside the pub following on the man’s heels was simple enough.

“Oy! Tom! I’ve got these mugs you should take a closer look at- one tap of your wand and instant refill!” the merchant called forth trying to peer around his large boxes towards the proprietor. “Blimey! It’s the Potters!”

Harry tripped the man with a jinx and hurriedly slipped up the stairs toward his room the echo of breaking glass drifting behind him.

“Blast McGruff! Look at the mess you’ve made – Merlin’s beard, why would I want glasses that break? Not even an unbreakable charm! I wasn’t born yesterday!”

Harry slipped inside his room and cast several hurried packing charms. Items whizzed around the room and landed messily inside his trunk. Closing the lid with a perfunctory snap, Harry shrunk it and stuffed the trunk into his pocket. Opening the window Harry climbed out just as a knock sounded on the wooden door.

Standing on the second story ledge Harry scrabbled his feet against the roofing and hurriedly pulled himself upwards as James stuck his head out the window and looked around.

“Can you see him?” Lily questioned impatiently from somewhere inside the room.

“No – the boy is nowhere in sight.”

“Oh, James! We have to find Harry and soon! What if Voldemort gets to him?”

“We’ll find him,” James assured grimly, stealing a glance up at Harry’s nearly invisible body with a squinty-eyed look.

Harry held his breath and didn’t move until James had retired back inside the building. Quickly Harry scrambled up the rest of the way and lurched forward grasping a chimney stack belching out green and blue smoke. Coughing as he inhaled the horrid stuff, Harry barely managed to pronounce properly a sticking charm that he attached to the soles of his shoes.

With his feet lightly gripping the wavy rooftop Harry found it easier to move and preceded without mishap the rest of the way forward. At the end of the building, Harry took a moment to gauge the distance between the rooftops before hurling himself across the empty space. Just missing the lip of the other roof Harry scrambled for a handhold and slipped off the side until his body hung above the ground.

Gritting his teeth Harry hissed an expletive and let go. As he flailed backwards, he aimed his wand as best he could to the ground and cast a cushioning charm. Landing rather painfully a moment later, Harry heard his glasses crunch and cursed rather soundly as pieces began to fall out of their frames and land on the ground.

“Oculus Repairo!” he grumbled jabbing his wand at his mangled frames. Massaging his nose, Harry waited impatiently for the magic to right his spectacles. “Infernal nuisance,” he declared wishing he did not need them.

A slight limp accompanied Harry as he walked to the end of the side alley and back out into the middle of Diagon Alley’s thoroughfare. Gingerly and with caution Harry moved in the shadows, aware of his parents roaming the alley and stopping already anxious shoppers to ask if they’d seen their son. Harry struggled against a laugh as one

wizard told them their son was dead and if they didn't know it then they obviously weren't the most attentive of parents. The mirroring flabbergasted looks at that hale declaration nearly gave Harry stitches as they stood their open mouthed and unsure of how to respond.

By the time they'd recovered themselves sufficiently, Harry could no longer hear them and was almost upon the Alley's Approved Ministry Apparition Site, or more commonly AMAS, and open Floo hearth – now closed because of the suspected tampering.

"What I need is a broom," he muttered disgustedly, glaring at the closed sign on the Floo with contempt wishing he were old enough to grab an Apparition License.

A swift glance over his shoulder at the dazzling display of Quality Quidditch Supplies and an idea formed. Retracing his steps back toward his parents he slipped past them again and ducked into the QQS. The cheery inside was warm and inviting. Harry browsed the racks quickly scanning the brooms and finding them outdated decided on the Firebolt, vaguely recalling that this model was the first of the line. There were many faults with the acceleration, speed, and overall handling but it would work. Harry grabbed it and slipped it under his invisibility cloak, left some money on the counter and bolted.

Outside it was a quick leap onto the broom and rearranging of the cloak to cover his feet and Harry was off, soaring over London.

**End Chapter 1.**

## Chapter 2

Inside the Shrieking Shack, Harry lay awake staring up at the slanting ceiling. Hedwig was out hunting and Serion was curled up in slumber beside him, stealing his warmth. Harry was trying futilely to coax whispers of his memory back as he attempted to mull over the problem of the cup-horcrux. Until he could get inside Hogwarts and locate the book in the restricted section, Harry wasn't at all sure on how to go about destroying a horcrux.

He sighed and tried to go to sleep, but when he closed his eyes Borgin's terrified face floated back to him. Groaning, Harry wrenched his eyes open forcing the memory to flee from consciousness with an iron will. Sacrifices had to be made; nothing could get in the way of winning this war against Voldemort.

Decisions rested squarely on his shoulders such as Borgin's death and his inaction against Daniel. When it came to Borgin Harry simply couldn't have let the weasel go, who knew what Voldemort would learn from the man's squealing. That didn't even take into account Voldemort's ability to read minds. And while Harry knew his decision was the right one to make it did not clear out the guilt that plagued him.

Annoyed by his thoughts, Harry plucked the cup up off the ground and held it firmly despite the cup's built-in stinging mechanism. The power of the stingers grew with every touch, as if the cup knew it was close to danger. Turning the cup over and over, Harry examined it wishing his memory would click open and show him what he was missing.

"All I need is a bloody clue," he grouched, prodding once more at the blank holes in his memory.

Serion mumbled something in his sleep and tucked his head further under his coils. Harry glanced over momentarily before focusing on the golden object in his hands. He would figure it out – he wasn't a Ravenclaw for nothing.

Slowly, carefully, Harry asked, "What do I know about this?"

He knew it contained a horcrux or one seventh of Voldemort's soul.

He knew it was Hufflepuff's cup. The markings gave it away.

He knew it was made of metal.

"I'll try that then," Harry said, reaching backwards for his wand. "Mollis Liqui."

The cup grew warm in his hand; the strength behind the stinger was like being electrocuted. Harry dropped it in shock and nursed his injured hand. The angry red of his palm matched the glowing red of the cup as it sat quietly on the floor in the space between his feet. Harry kicked the cup and watched it roll a few feet. It was neither softened nor melting.

Harry applied a healing charm. "Hm... that didn't work."

He knew he could not destroy the metal of the cup.

He knew the cup shot angry electrocuting stingers worse than any Grade A hex.

He knew the cup was protecting itself from sensed danger.

That made Harry the danger.

So the question then became how was Harry dangerous to a cup?

"Magically, physically, or mentally?" he chanted aloud. "Magically, physically, or mentally."

Those were the only options. He had tried magically and it failed. He would try physically next.

Decided, Harry stood up and stalked over to the cup. Hovering above the angry red cup Harry assessed his options. He added a charm to add force and strength to the bottom of his shoe. Quickly before



thinking it through Harry slammed his heel down on the cup only to end up sprawled on the floor the air knocked out of him.

“Sweet Merlin,” he wheezed, struggling to sit up.

The cup was nowhere to be seen. Confused, Harry looked around the room for it. A faint reddish glow under the bed alerted him to its location. Scrabbling on his stomach Harry peered under the bed and found the faintly buzzing cup in the corner farthest away from him. Aiming his wand under the bed Harry summoned the cup and ducked as it flew angrily past his head.

Spinning in the middle of the room like a top the Horcrux whistled and shouted loud enough to rouse Serion from his slumber.

§ Aesop’s tail – what is that infernal racket?§

§ That,§ Harry responded grimly casting a silencing hex on the object, relieving both Serion and himself. §Was the horcrux making itself known to be particularly upset with me.§

§ What on earth did you do to it?§

§ Try to hex it into the next century and crush it when the bloody thing wouldn’t go ahead and melt into a puddle like I wanted.§

§ Really, my liege-§

§ Harry.§

§ Harry, it is not to be unexpected. The cup is a vile piece of magic.§

§ Don’t I know it.§

Looking between the glowing red cup and Harry, Serion asked §What do you plan to do next?§

§ Hell. I don't know. § Harry frowned in consternation, idly flicking his wand and shooting green and red sparks from the tip. § It can't be touched magically it seems. At least not by any curse I could dream of right now. I couldn't crush it under my foot either. §

§ So you wait and do more research. §

§ I can't afford to wait. Even now Voldemort has enacted several movements I had not anticipated. §

§ You are only just fifteen. §

§ Older if you count the memories. §

§ Which you have not lived, § Serion pointed out. § You can not hope to anticipate everything even if you were proficient at Divination. §

§ With the life I've led, Serion, it's impossible to imagine a time when I did not try to anticipate my opponents. §

§ You are not yet in Dumbledore's league. §

Harry glowered, the sparks erupting in an angry shower from his wand. § I plan to be. I plan to surpass them all and change the rules. §

§ Then knowledge is your power, § Serion asserted calmly.

§ No, § Harry countered. § Surprise is my power. I must be a step ahead. §

§ Does not knowledge gain you this? §

§ Action. §

§ Knowledge plays it's part too. §

Harry gripped his wand tighter. §I know what you're saying Serion. The advice is well meant but this cup knows something I do not and not know until I confront it.§

§ It is a cup, it can not harm you if you leave it alone.§

§ I fear its existence is not to be tolerated. Stand back.§

With that warning Harry hurled a powerful blasting hex at the object and sent it crashing straight through the wall. Debris rained down and the whole of the shack shuddered in response to this violent attack. Harry blasted open the hole in the wall and stepped through in pursuit of the horcrux.

§ Your secrets will be mine, horcrux. Reveal yourself to me.§

Harry glanced around the room searching for the glow that would deceive the cup's location. It was not however an angry red that caught his eye but a blackish shadow stirring. Stilling Harry watched warily as the shadow revealed itself to be a twisting oozing mass of blackish substance.

It seemed to bubble in the oddest ways. A closer inspection nearly unmanned Harry. Faces frozen in terror loomed out of the goo at random intervals silent screaming at the nightmare that was taking shape out of them.

Body parts formed and broke free of the rising mass. Harry held his breath as twin glowing red eyes emerged from a faceless figure. Harry knew those eyes. Voldemort, pale and translucent stood before him. His red eyes cast an amused look about the room before striding forward.

Harry held his ground even as his heart beat an erratic tattoo. Wincing slightly, Harry cringed back from Voldemort's approach.

"Hello, Harry," Voldemort said caressingly, soothing a ghostlike finger across Harry's scar. "I knew you would come for me."

Harry gasped at the pain the phantomlike touch and wrenched himself away. "How?"

"I may have only a portion of your memories, Harry, but it is enough to know. You destroyed my diary and Salazar's ring. I am to be next if you can manage. But facing me when I am uninformed is one thing and all together something else when I am."

"I should have known," Harry muttered, grimacing.

Here he had thought that it was the Voldemort in the present wrecking havoc on the wizarding world that was in possession of his memories. It was his horcruxes. Knowledge of this variety in their already invincible hands would make them nearly impossible to defeat.

"How are you here before me?"

Voldemort smirked. "You called to me. I could not resist such a challenge. I fear I am not powerful enough on my own to sustain myself in the flesh, but your body will hold me nicely I should think. Then I will join myself and together be undefeatable by all, even the ludicrously sentimental Dumbledore."

Harry cast a protection spell on himself and Voldemort laughed.

"That won't help you, Harry. Nothing will."

As Voldemort drew nearer, Harry felt dizzy. His breaths came in shallower gasps and a chill slithered down his spine.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry yelled, casting about wildly for some spell to protect him from Voldemort's wraith like form.

A silvery animal burst froth and charged. It appeared to be a – a jackalope. The antlered hare flew with deadly precision toward Voldemort and gored him in the chest. Voldemort stumbled backwards, along fingered hand pressed to his chest. When he drew it away, black ooze filled the hole.

Harry's eyes gleamed. "You seem to be akin to a dementor right now. Though I've never seen a dementor react to a Patronus the way you seem to."

"So it seems," Voldemort agreed deceptively calm. Red eyes flashed, a pale hand struck out and the jackalope vanished.

"I can call another," Harry replied. "You've done nothing to save yourself."

"By all means, you are right." Voldemort sprung forward and threw himself into Harry.

Harry gasped, arching wildly as Voldemort's spirit entered him. The coldness was nothing compared to the violation of his person. Harry struggled to remain upright his legs collapsing under him as black goo started to leak out from the center of his chest and spread covering his clothes and skin.

"Evanescio!" he chanted, vanishing the substance. More followed, faster, spreading further and Harry cast the spell again.

§ Master!§

§ Stay away!§ Harry hissed, recasting the vanishing spell as fast as possible.

The relentless pursuit never let up and quickly Harry tired, unable to keep the substance from spreading. He focused his attentions to keep it away from his chest and head, leaving his lower body unprotected. It took hold there readily enough but was stopped from taking over in the direction it most needed to go to win Harry over.

§ You can't expect him to tire! What will you do?§

Harry shook his head, unable to speak for how fast he threw out spells, casting again and again in Latin.

§ Master, let me do something. Let me help!§

Harry shook his head fiercely, missed a beat in casting and Voldemort quickly claimed the flesh left unguarded. It was harder to breathe and Harry knew he was on the verge of hyperventilating. Air was quickly used up chanting and every breath drawn gave Voldemort ground.

Before Harry knew what happened the world was dark. He was being suffocated, killed off so that the parasite could enter the host and consume the rest. Harry fought when there was no air to breathe but eventually his struggles lessened. Resistance was overcome, like ants marching over the object of their new desire.

A soft sinister laughter echoed in his mind, sparking hatred so profound that it blistered Harry's insides. Angry and terrified he clung to consciousness with renewed determination.

§ You are weak,§ Voldemort whispered sinuously. §You are tired. I can't outwait you. It's not much longer now.§

§ It is my body and my magic. It answers to me, not you! § Harry declared hotly, finding his voice through the goo that was clogging the passageway for air.

§ I am most persuasive,§ Voldemort chuckled. §Your struggle is admirable, but this is what I am. This is what I was meant to do. The moment you called me, beckoned me to come to you my instincts were activated. A horcrux's duty is to become, to possess whatever means is necessary to achieve that goal.§

Harry choked, coughing up a deluge of sludge. §You are a fragment of nothing.§

§ One does not need to possess an entire soul to overcome a weaker opponent,§ the voice taunted. §I am but a mere fraction of the whole, as you say, and yet you are no match!§

§ You have no power except that which I unwittingly gave you.§

§ Do not underestimate me. It has proven to be Dumbledore's mistake again and again. Power, fool, is in knowledge. Power is in strength of will. Power is control!§

Harry spat and laughed weakly to himself. §You are a great teacher, indeed.§

§ I could have been a great teacher, yes, if only-§

§ Go and be no more!§ Harry commanded, pushing willpower behind his words, lacing them with magic.

§ What is this?§ Voldemort cried out, the struggle once again turned. §What is this magic?§

Harry drew a deep breath, his first true breath since the fight had begun and filled his lungs. He reiterated his command and laughed at Voldemort's frustrated lamentations.

The black goo spilled off of him in a rush, separating from his person like oil from water. As it left him, Harry regain the ability to move and hauled himself to a sitting position.

The sludge boiled and bubbled, frothing like an angry sea. Faces came and went at alarming speed. The horror of the horcrux burned off into nothingness. The sludge became vapor and the vapor hovered like a sickness.

§ Go. Fade away. You are nothing.§ Harry said simply and watched it happen with tired relief.

Serion raced toward him. §Master—Harry, sir, how on earth did you accomplish such a feat?§

§ I used the knowledge he gave me against him,§ Harry replied simply, closing his eyes in exhaustion.

§ What knowledge was that?§ Serion examined him anxiously.

Harry waved him away. §If I called him out of the object, I could certainly destroy him by another turn of phrase.§

Serion's shock was great and a hundred new questions spilled forth but Harry simply shook his head and struggled to a standing position. §What I need now is sleep. All this can wait until after I've recovered.§

§ Yes, Harry,§ Serion replied, trailing behind him into the other room.

Harry waved his wand and conjured a thick mattress. With a gusty sigh he fell upon it and soon slipped into the sleep that had escaped him earlier. Not even the nightmare of what he'd just faced haunted him in his dreams. There the only things that touched him were the crispy air and sound of rustling grass. All other sensations simply faded away to nothing.

End Chapter 2.



### Chapter 3

Three months later saw Harry unavoidably back at school. His nonappearance at the Sorting Feast caused all sorts of rumors that led to Dumbledore putting the entire Order on his trail, and while Harry was good he wasn't that good. Serion still chortled at the memory when Harry got nicked by Sirius, the sly dog, just as he thought he'd escaped from the Order's clutches.

Now back at the skullduggery of the school and its daily routine, Harry had no time to find the other horcrux. The one Riddle had inadvertently slipped when he'd spoken of Harry's memories. The original order of horcrux destruction had been the diary then Salazar's ring, not the diary then Helga's cup. Was the cup the third one to have been destroyed? Is that why it only knew of two? Or perhaps it had been last destroyed and only received memories of the first two fights.

Harry knew the next encounters were going to be more exhausting and mind bending. It was good to know that the walking Voldemort had no memories of his past... or future... but it would make fighting the broken pieces of soul that much harder. They would be playing with him and using their knowledge against him. Harry could not expect all battles to end so easily. Certainly one horcrux or another would know exactly how Harry had defeated it. Harry would be in trouble then because the horcrux would do everything in its power to stop him.

Training, growing up, doing homework and dealing with déjà vu would all have to have their time and place. Luckily or perhaps unluckily, Dumbledore insisted on training Harry. His progress could not be checked or hidden from those sharp beady eyes. So Harry did not try to mislead Dumbledore in his skills. Tonight was just another lesson in learning how to take pain. Harry came away from Dumbledore's office in considerable discomfort. Nothing serious enough to require Madam Pomfrey's personal care, this made Harry grateful.

Walking down the castle corridors, Harry nodded absently to some of the older students still out and about who waved to him. The enchantment, which Harry broke early that summer having faded,

exposed him to the scrutiny of everyone. Before he was the invisible forgotten twin of the famous Boy Who Lived, now he was heralded the Chosen One.

Girls giggled behind their hands at him, teachers called him to the front to explain or perform magic for the rest of the class, and boys from his year were trying to claim the open spot for his best friend. Fifteen, Harry concluded was a difficult age to be and he didn't quite know how to handle the sudden attention he received. The only person who hadn't changed was Snape, much to Harry's relief. Snape could be counted on to be snide, petty, and infinitely uninterested in Harry's new status, something he delighted informing Harry of time and again in classes.

He came to the major staircases and started to climb wearily, feeling every ache and pain with each step. At the landing Harry saw a couple of boys from his year teasing a girl from his house. They were pulling at her hair, summoning her things, and levitating her in the air. Incensed, Harry whipped out his wand and slashed it forcefully. The boys flipped upside down, their yelps of terror caused Harry to smile, his eyes lighting with a feral gleam.

"Hey! Let us down!"

"What is this?" he asked silkily summoning their wands.

The girl was released abruptly from their spells and Harry shot out a hand to save her. Her body slowed until gently her toes lighted on the ground. The boys were clamoring loudly, upset and scared now the tables were turned, but Harry had eyes only for the slight blond girl.

"Are you all right?" he asked, as her things fell around them causing a racket.

She nodded mutely, her blue eyes wide and serene. Harry scowled and pointed at her again releasing her from the boys' spell, this time a silencer. The girl smiled beatifically. "Thank you."

Harry turned back on the boys furious again. "You silenced her? You cowardly maggots! I should k--"

"They were only playing," the girl inserted quickly, stepping forward.

Harry glowered, whipping his head back to the boys. "The girl says you were only playing, but we all know better don't we?"

"Honest it was just for fun!"

"We weren't going to hurt her!"

"No," Harry answered, "You were going to torture her because she weaker and unable to fight back."

"It's all right, Harry," the girl said softly, pulling a strand of blond hair behind her ear, revealing a tiny spoon earring. "Let them down."

Harry did so begrudgingly. The boys fell down hard, their rumps smacking the stone walkway. Harry tossed them their wands and the boys scrambled after them. When they held them, both seemed to draw courage. One even raised his wand threateningly, but Harry merely raised an eyebrow and pointed a finger at them. They laughed at him until they realized their voices were gone.

Fear replaced their cruel mirth and Harry snarled, "Go back to your houses. If you're lucky you won't run into anyone who will take advantage of your silence."

They ran down the hall and just before they rounded the corner, Harry hit them with a tripping jinx watching them sprawl forward face first. He snorted, watching them scramble away. When they were gone he turned back to the girl and stooped down to help her pick up her things.

"Does that usually happen?" he asked, jerking his chin in the direction where the Hufflepuff boys had disappeared.

“Sometimes,” she hummed quietly. “Sometimes it’s Slytherins or Gryffindors.”

Harry stared at her incredulously. “Hufflepuffs, Slytherins, and Gryffindors?”

She nodded. “Ravenclaw girls too.”

“You’re picked on by everybody?”

“They don’t mean anything by it. My mother used to say that--”

“Nobody stands up for you?”

The girl frowned at him. “You did.”

“Besides me,” Harry huffed impatiently.

“Professors--”

“Don’t you have any friends?” Harry demanded.

She shook her head, and plucked from his fingers one of her school books. “I’m odd.”

“What does that have to do with it?”

“Everything,” she answered. “I’m Loony Lovegood to them, but that’s just because they don’t understand.”

“Loony?” he murmured, and then recognition dawned. “Luna. You’re Luna.”

Luna smiled happily. “That’s right.”

Harry frowned and waved his hand irritably, gathering up all the rest of her things and putting them into her bag. Luna zipped it up and slung it over her shoulder. “Thanks again.”

“You need to watch your back Luna,” Harry warned her.

He stood and motioned her to the stairwell as one of the staircases moved toward them. When it stopped, Luna hopped up the first stair and continued lightly. Harry followed slowly, frowning in thought all the while.

“Luna.”

“Yes, Harry?” she called over her shoulder.

“Isn’t there anybody that you talk to?”

“Oh, I talk to people all the time. They never understand me though. It’s the bliffsowers at work unfortunately. They confuse everyone.”

“Bliffsowers?”

“Oh yes, they’re the ones that first came forward about their part in the Demented Conspiracy Minister Fudge has been perpetuating all year. He hired them to confuse the masses about all his failings. Unfortunately it’s only helped Lord Flight From Death gain power.”

“Voldemort?” Harry questioned.

“That’s the one,” she said, skipping to the next stairwell as it slid their way.

Harry scratched his head in confusion. He’d never heard of bliffsowers or the Demented Conspiracy. Something was strange about her recital. Gently, he asked, “Did you hit your head when the boys were tormenting you?”

“Of course not or we’d be heading toward the hospital.”

Harry tried another tactful approach. “Did one of the boys tell you about Demented Conspiracy?”

Luna looked back startled, and then she laughed. “Oh no, no, Mr. Rodeny Neworth cracked the scandal. You can read all about it in my daddy’s newspaper, the Quibbler.”

That explained everything, Harry thought, determined not to wound her with his opinions on the rag. His attitude towards the Quibbler echoed that of the majority of the wizarding world as being complete filth. More rot was published on one page of the Quibbler than in the entirety of the Daily Prophet. That said something. Nobody took the Quibbler seriously. It was more fiction than fact. People contributed it as a lark, hiding their identities behind ridiculous names. He should know as Daniel and his friends had once sent their divinations homework in as true prophecy.

“Do you read my daddy’s paper?” Luna asked brightly as they climbed the last staircase.

“Er... no, sorry.”

“Oh,” she said, her cheerful expression drooping.

“No money,” Harry found himself offering with a shrug.

Luna perked up. “Oh!” She stared at him for a moment full of concern before saying lightly, “I’ll ask daddy to put a subscription in your name. Everybody should have access to the truth.”

Harry held back a snort of laughter and managed to respond without a betraying flicker of horror. “Thank you, Luna.”

“You’re welcome, Harry,” she replied, smiling shyly before saying the password to the librarian portrait and slipped into the common room.

Harry shook his head bemusedly and followed. Several people called out to him as he entered. Stephen Cornfoot especially pandering begged his attention on some Quidditch maneuvers for their team. Cho Chang glared at him from across the room. Her demotion to

second string made her resentful of Harry. With a sigh Harry joined the cluster of Ravenclaw Quidditch players and sat down. His eyes drifted across the common finding Luna talking to Hermione animatedly about something. Hermione had a peculiarly pained expression on her face as she listened to the younger girl. Harry chortled to himself and focused on the moving diagrams before him.

End Chapter 3.

## Chapter 4

It was a cloudy Sunday afternoon. Ravenclaw was getting ready to play against Slytherin. It was the first match of the year and excitement was running high. Stephen Cornfoot, the youngest captain of all four houses as a fifth year, wanted to prove himself against Oliver Wood and Marcus Flint, who had become captains themselves in their fourth and third year respectively. Cornfoot considered this match his first test, not only because it was his first chance to prove his mettle as a captain, but also because it was against Flint's handpicked team, a team that was picked for its sheer bulk and aggression.

Cornfoot had the team sequestered in the locker rooms, a floating diagram behind his right ear as he barked out orders to the chasers.

"They're heavier on the brooms. Fly up if you're in danger. Pass often, don't take chances with them. Flint's team won't play chicken. Give them a reason and they will pummel you."

"We know this," Marcus Belby commented, rolling his eyes. "You've told us all week."

"And perhaps you'll remember it!" Cornfoot snapped before turning his attention to Harry. "You have to catch the snitch, Harry. Even if we're losing and it means catching the snitch won't win us the match. Flint and his snakes can't be allowed a sweeping victory or we'll have no shot for the Cup."

"Right," Harry drawled, suppressing a yawn. Like Belby and the rest of the Chasers, Harry had heard this time and again over the last week and was thoroughly sick of Cornfoot's pestering.

"Look alive!" Cornfoot grumped, whacking the drawing board with his wand. "I'm switching out the plays. A little badger told me we were spied on at the last meeting and we're not going to take any chances."

"What!" chorused half of the team at once.



"Is this a joke, Cornfoot?" James Wordsense, the team's seventh year beater, demanded. "You're kidding, right?"

Cornfoot shook his head. "No, I'm not. We're at a disadvantage since we'll be running last year's plays, but I'm hoping Flint's team is so focused on our new plays they won't know what hit them. By next match we'll have fresh plays again."

They heard Dean Thomas announce the Slytherins. Cornfoot ordered everyone to line up and get ready for Ravenclaw's introduction. When it came everyone kicked up and flew out to meet the cheers of three quarters of the school. Nobody liked Slytherins besides Slytherins.

Harry felt the breeze in his face and grinned. A glance at the crowd revealed those who were the strongest Quidditch and House fans. Somebody was wearing a giant eagle head which was shrieking in the Ravenclaw stands, a group of male Hufflepuffs were shirtless and painted in Ravenclaw colors spelling "Go Eagles", and the redheaded Weasleys of Gryffindor were waving banners and sending out sparks in blue and bronze.

The Slytherins were just as gung-ho in their approach. The third and fourth year girls were directing everyone in a new anti-Ravenclaw chant under sonorous while the boys of the same year were conjuring snakes and banishing them toward the other house stands.

Madam Hooch blew her whistle recalling Harry to the field of play as the game began. He circled lazily, keeping his eye on Flint's seeker Urquhart while Draco Malfoy snatched the quaffle from Belby and shot off down the pitch toward the goals.

Wordsense and Cornfoot were scrambling for the bludgers to smack in Malfoy's direction but Flint's beaters, Crabbe and Goyle, were running too good an interference. Malfoy scored and the score became 10 to 0, Slytherin. A rousing set of 'boos' filled the stadium until the action picked up again forcing everyone to forget the last goal.

Flint's team began their fouling strategy, always under Hooch's nose but never in front of her. First Montague and Flint blagged Belby and

McDougal, stopping the chasers from reaching Malfoy as he scored again on Li. The frustrated expression would not leave her face for the rest of the match.

Flint then blatched Cornfoot, who missed the bludger flying toward Harry. Quick maneuvering saved Harry from getting knocked off his broom, but when the bludger came back Harry had to dive into the middle of both team's chasers to get away. Their angry shouts echoed in Harry's ears as he whizzed back up over the action.

Hooch caught the Slytherin keeper, Pucey, flacking and gave Ravenclaw two foul shots. Entwhistle took the first and got it in, but McDougal missed his much to his annoyance and play resumed.

It was a brutal match and the score climbed steadily in Slytherin's favor. The double eight loop Li flew wasn't helping and now only Harry catching the snitch could save the match. Urquhart's lazy smug face met Harry's on opposite sides of the pitch. The challenge was clear; the hunt was on.

Harry swooped toward Pucey as McDougal and Entwhistle lobbed the quaffle toward the right hoop. Distracted by Harry's near collision, Pucey missed the quaffle. The score was now 360 to 150. Pucey cried foul as Harry flew away, streaking down the pitch toward the first flash of gold all game.

Urquhart dallied around by the Slytherin stands, flexing his muscles for the girls leaning over the railing until Flint grabbed the beater bat from Crabbe and struck the bludger in his direction. Urquhart took off after Harry but he was too late. The snitch would be Harry's and the game would be over.

The glint of gold turned out to be a floating galleon. Harry snarled and grabbed it before the trickster could reclaim it and twisted back around. Urquhart, having learned his lesson, flew right on top of Harry, his feet literally banging into Harry's head every now and then.

It was another fifteen minutes before the snitch made a real appearance. It showed up while Slytherin chasers were executing a Parkin's Pincer on Entwhistle. Harry and Urquhart dove straight

through the maneuvers. Entwhistle took advantage of the distraction and made a reverse pass to Belby who performed Hogwart's first long goal in ten years. The scoreboard read 390 to 220.

The snitch darted right, left, up, left, down, right, down before plummeting to the grass line. Harry flattened himself on the broom determined more than ever to reach the snitch first. Urquhart made a grab for Harry's broom tail and just barely missed, dislodging several twigs. They were now in straight verticals with less than twenty feet to the ground.

Urquhart balked at the thought of risking his face's good looks and pulled his broom up from the dive. Harry on the other hand planned to grab the snitch or hit the ground. He did the latter. The breath knocked out of him and certain he broke his elbow and a few ribs, Harry blinked up at the sky through hovering players.

For a moment nobody moved and then Hooch landed next to Harry. She pried his right hand open. There was nothing there. The crowd groaned. She pried his left hand open and one crushed snitch fluttered feebly before giving up and dropping into Harry's outstretched palm. The rousing cheer from the stands broke over Harry like a wave. He smiled once and then blacked out to Hooch asking if he was all right.

"Thank starnips, you're awake!" Luna cried out as Harry opened his eyes. The Quidditch team lined up behind her began calling out congratulations and praise.

"Flint's demanding a rematch right now. He says you cheated," Li said with a smile of pure evil delight.

"What was the score?" Harry demanded, accepting the glass of water she handed him.

"390 to 390," Entwhistle boasted. "I scored one last goal allowing us to tie the match."

"You did good Harry," Cornfoot declared, wrapping an arm around Li. "Though your broom's a mess now. Twigs broken everywhere. I wouldn't be surprised if it listed now."

Harry grimaced. "Fantastic."

"Pomfrey is going to kick us out in a minute," Wordsense noted, as Hogwart's Healer marched toward the group. "Party in the common room."

Harry nodded just as Pomfrey declared visiting hours over. As they drifted out, Luna stayed behind to wish him a quick recovering and to warn him of wrackspurts before hurrying out to meet Hermione in the hall. Harry watched them both disappear with a bemused expression.

What was Hermione doing waiting for Luna in the hall? They weren't friends. Luna drove the older girl bat-crazy he was sure. Too tired to puzzle out the mystery Harry finished his water and turned over for a nap.

The next time Harry opened his eyes was early morning. The people around his bed this time were not fellow Ravenclaws but Dumbledore, his parents and his 'uncles.' Harry heaved a heartfelt sigh and pushed up onto his elbows. Clearly he wasn't getting out of the hospital wing without a lecture.

"That was some stunt you pulled," Sirius ventured, his grin a tad wolfish.

"You're lucky you weren't more seriously injured, Harry," Lily scolded while sitting down at the edge of his bed. He shied away from her gentle touch. Her lost look did not impress him.

"What do you want?" he asked brusquely, unable to keep the irritation out of his voice. He looked at Dumbledore, knowing the answer would come from him.

Dumbledore stared at him steadily, his owlish eyes not blinking behind their gold frames. Harry grew uncomfortable and looked away hastily. Something just out of reach in his memories told him not to try a staring contest with the old man.

"Harry," he said slowly, as if savoring the syllables. "What if I were to tell you that what you're doing is a big mistake?"

Harry frowned. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"Harry, we've been here before, don't you remember? This game of yours gets tiresome and if Voldemort is going to be defeated it won't be by me. It's going to be you – we were wrong about Daniel. I'd say it was your magic and not really us, but that'd be a cold comfort to you and you wouldn't believe me."

"What are you talking about Dumbledore?" James asked, frowning at the headmaster. He took Lily's hand in his and turned his gaze around at the rest of the group.

Harry felt equally confused.

"I can read minds with legilimency," Dumbledore explained, keeping his eyes on Harry who flinched at the news. "I see this word isn't completely foreign to you."

"I don't exactly recall it," Harry said quietly, "but based on what you've just said I have figured it out. You use magic to mind fuck people."

"No, no, no, my dear boy. That's hardly what I do."

"You just read people and steal their thoughts."

"Again, this conversation, why must you always respond in the same manner? Could you not be more original? This conversation is the same as one we've had before, don't you recall?" Dumbledore took off his spectacles and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I am much too old for this. Multiple timelines. Multiple messes. Harry will you ever get it right?"

"We don't know what you're talking about," Sirius interjected.

"Neither do I," Harry repeated.

"Of course you don't. You've screwed things up Harry. You need to trust me. I've played this game of yours too many times to count and this constant repetition is wearing thin. I can't juggle these many simultaneous instances anymore by myself."

Harry's mouth thinned and his nose flared. "How many times have you gone through this?"

"This is my thirteenth restart and frankly while the number is more likely to help Voldemort than us we have to try and get it right this time. We need to work together."

The room got deathly quiet while waiting for Harry to work it all out. The others too struggled with comprehension but knew better than to interfere. Finally Harry opened his mouth and spoke four words.

"I don't believe you."

Then all chaos broke loose.

End Chapter 4.